

Dear Friends:

You all know that I am dedicated to reforming and improving South Carolina's public schools. But there is something else that I care deeply about—our environment. That's why I've lent my time to organizations like Clean Water of South Carolina and the Palmetto Conservation Foundation, groups dedicated to conserving our natural resources, saving historical landmarks, and promoting outdoor recreation.

April is "Keep America Beautiful" month, a good time to talk about the responsibility each of us has to preserve and protect our surroundings. There are so many little things that we can do every day—from putting trash where it belongs and recycling, to turning off lights and carpooling.

The Office of Environmental Education at the South Carolina Department of Education is leading efforts to promote environmental stewardship and citizenship among our students. Both are vital to South Carolina's future.

Last fall, my agency purchased two plug-in hybrid diesel-electric buses that have lower fuel costs and greatly-reduced emissions. And earlier this year, we received a \$244,000 grant to help us further reduce the amount of pollution created by diesel school buses.

I'm most proud, though, of what we're doing on the local level.

Three of our schools are among the Department of Health and Environmental Control's (DHEC) 2008 Champions of the Environment. The biology II classes at Barnwell High School are working to convince Edisto Island storeowners to use less lighting in their parking lots when sea turtles are nesting and hatching. Blythewood High School students are trying to reduce their carbon footprints—the amount of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases produced when fossil fuels are used for energy. At Stone Academy for the Arts in Greenville, students have stopped the erosion that made their playground unsafe. Finally, a public school teacher, student, and high school were also recognized by DHEC for their recycling efforts.

Susan Ward from Whittemore Park Middle School teaches her students to conserve energy, even involving them in river sweeps. And there are countless other examples of school environmentalists at work in every corner of our state.

From our mountains and rolling fields to our coast, plains, and beaches, South Carolina is beautiful. Thanks for joining me in doing all that you can to keep it that way.

Sincerely,

Jim Rex

State Superintendent of Education